PATTERNS OF POWER · THE IBERIA SERIES · VOLUME I

The Word Without a Warrant

Al-Andalus from the Crossing to the Fall of the Caliphate, 711–1031: how a hunted prince ruled by a word whose owners had condemned him, and how the machine he built outlived the men who thought they owned it

Thomas J. Bryan

with Claude (Anthropic)

2026

A Note on This Collaboration

This volume, like the series it belongs to, is a collaboration between a human author and an artificial intelligence. The analytical framework — the floor of force and the managed belief, the loaded words, the tested and the revealed, the traps of instrument and metabolism, and the standing disciplines of the project — is Thomas J. Bryan's, developed across the collection this volume joins. The historical research, the verification of dates and figures against current scholarship, the architecture of the argument and the drafting of the text are the work of Claude, an AI model built by Anthropic, directed by the author's framework and revised under his disciplines. An earlier study of this material exists in the project's files, written before the series' vocabulary and methods had matured; this volume supersedes it, and where the evidence has forced revisions of the framework itself — above all on the counterweights proposition, in the closing part — the revisions are stated openly, because the project's own coda requires its theses to be held as tested, never revealed. Whatever errors remain are the collaboration's own.

The Argument in Eight Parts

❧

I. The Floor That Cracked

A kingdom of millions fell to a few thousand raiders in a season — because established orders are forfeited by fracture at their own apex, not overthrown from below. What the conquerors captured was a running machine.

II. The Price of Belief

The surrender contract of 713, read as the constitution of eight centuries: extraction dressed as exchange, a conversion gradient that recruited the governed into the governors' faith, and the two new communities — converts and the Arabised — whose grievances drive the rest of the volume.

III. The Massacre and the Refugee

The Abbasids exterminated the Umayyad dynasty at a banquet and missed one prince, who swam a river, walked for five years, and fitted a broken province like a key — then took every title except the one that would have cost more than it paid.

IV. The Word Without a Warrant

How a condemned rebel ran Islam's legitimating apparatus against its owner's anathema for three centuries: a word universal enough to legitimate cannot be fenced, and belief — real, sincere belief — binds to local performance, not distant title.

V. The Canon and the Scholars

The emirs imported Medina's law to make rule cheap and installed a scholar class they used but did not own. The canon bit back — crucifixions, a razed suburb, an exile fleet that conquered Crete — and the counterweight's fatal limit was set: it could veto conduct, but not absorb succession.

VI. The Strains the Machine Survived

Forty-eight Christians volunteered for the executioner to redraw a dissolving boundary, and the priced community's own bishops condemned them; then the converts' unpaid cheque of brotherhood was presented at swordpoint by half the peninsula, and the order barely outlived the bill.

VII. The Third Caliph

A rival caliphate in Africa made the modest title untenable, and in 929 there were three Commanders of the Faithful — the universal word fractured into rival ownerships, each fragment working perfectly on the ground its holder held. The splendour that followed was budgeted; so, invisibly, was the ruin.

VIII. The Capture and the Rupture

A manager sealed the caliph, moved the state across town, and ran legitimacy by subscription; his son reached for the word itself and both halves died. The fitna, the accounting, the thirty small Cordobas — and the audit: what the case confirms, what it strains, and the counter-position held.

Preface

This is the first volume of the Iberia Series, and the opening of a three-volume experiment that the whole of the Patterns of Power project has, in a sense, been waiting for. The Iberian peninsula is the only ground in the comparative record on which the same territory ran the full cycle of conquest, governance and reversal twice, in both directions — Christian, then Muslim, then Christian again — with the governing machinery surviving every reversal intact; and which then crated that machinery up and shipped it across an ocean, where much of it is still standing. Other volumes in this collection have isolated single dynamics in single hierarchies. Iberia is the laboratory where nearly all of them run at once, on shared ground, against each other.

This first volume covers the three centuries of al-Andalus from the crossing of 711 to the abolition of the Cordoban caliphate in 1031, and its spine is a single question: how did a hunted refugee, formally condemned as a rebel by the supreme religious authority of his own faith, successfully operate that faith's entire legitimating apparatus — and how did the order he built die of solutions that were, every one of them, rational when adopted? Along the way the volume examines the most consequential governance instrument in the series — the dhimma, the priced subordination of a conquered majority by a tiny minority — because the later volumes will watch the Christian kingdoms adopt it article by article, and the reader must know the machine before watching it change hands.

The volume is written for a reader new to structural history, and it asks of that reader only one discipline: to keep separate, throughout, the question of what was believed (which this project never adjudicates) from the question of what the believing did (which it counts as carefully as the sources allow). The dead of this volume — on the scaffolds of Cordoba, in the razed suburb, in the sacked cities of the fitna — are held with the gravity they are owed. They are evidence here, but they were never only that.

PART I

The Floor That Cracked

A kingdom of five million people fell to a raiding force in a single season — which is not a fact about the raiders.

The Season the Kingdom Disappeared

In the spring of 711 a force of perhaps seven to twelve thousand men — the figures in the sources vary, and all of them were written long after — crossed the strait from North Africa under a Berber commander named Tariq ibn Ziyad, and landed at the rock that still bears his name: Jabal Tariq, Gibraltar. They were mostly Berbers, recent converts themselves, stiffened by a smaller number of Arabs, and they had come, as far as anyone on either shore could tell, to raid. Iberia at that moment was a Christian kingdom two centuries old, heir to the richest province of the western Roman Empire, with a population modern estimates put somewhere between four and seven million, a capital at Toledo, a literate church, a law code, and a king.

Within a few months the king was dead and his army had ceased to exist. Within three years the capital had fallen, a second and larger army had crossed under the governor of North Africa himself, and the new power was issuing coins. Within a decade the conquest was effectively complete from the southern coast to the Pyrenees, and the only ground not under the new administration was a strip of wet mountain along the Bay of Biscay that the conquerors, reasonably, did not think worth the cost of taking. A kingdom that had stood for two hundred years had been replaced in roughly the time it takes to plant and harvest three crops.

Every later tradition explained this with a story about belief. The Arabic chronicles explained it as the manifest favour of God upon the community of His Prophet — the faith had crossed the water and the false kingdom had dissolved before it, as false things do before true ones. The Christian chronicles, beginning within living memory and swelling for centuries afterwards, explained it as the manifest judgement of God upon a sinful people — the Goths had grown luxurious and corrupt, their king had violated a nobleman's daughter, and the conquest was the wage of sin. Both stories survive because both were useful: one legitimated the new order, the other disciplined the old one's heirs. Neither survives contact with the question this series always asks first: not *who deserved to win*, but *what was actually holding the loser up* — and the answer, in the Visigothic case, is that by the spring of 711 almost nothing was.

❧

A Kingdom Held Together at the Top

The Visigothic kingdom was, on parchment, one of the more sophisticated states of its century. It had a single law code applying to all its subjects, the *Liber Iudiciorum*, when most of the post-Roman west still ran parallel laws for Romans and barbarians. It held regular church councils at Toledo that functioned as something like a parliament of bishops and palace aristocrats, legislating on everything from liturgy to treason. Since 589, when King Reccared abandoned the Arian Christianity of his Gothic ancestors for the Catholicism of his Roman subjects, crown and church had been fused into a single legitimating apparatus: the king was anointed, the councils sanctified his decrees, and rebellion was defined — explicitly, in council canons — as sacrilege.

But the kingdom had never solved the one problem a hereditary order exists to solve: who rules next. The Gothic monarchy was elective in principle and seized in practice. Of the long line of Visigothic kings, a remarkable proportion died by violence or deposition; a much later chronicler's tag, the *morbus Gothicus* — the Gothic disease — named the pattern of regicide and usurpation that ran through the dynasty like a fault line. Each succession was a crisis; each crisis was settled by one aristocratic faction breaking another; and each settlement left the broken faction's estates, offices and grudges lying around as fuel for the next round. The councils' anathemas against rebellion were not strength but symptom — an order does not need to excommunicate usurpers seven times a century unless usurpation is how it actually works.

There was a second fault, and the kingdom had cut it itself. From 613 onwards, successive Visigothic kings had turned on their Jewish subjects with escalating ferocity — forced baptisms under Sisebut, confiscations, prohibitions of practice, and finally, under Egica in 694, a decree enslaving the Jews of the realm wholesale on the charge of conspiring with their co-religionists across the strait. Whether that conspiracy existed before the decree, the decree guaranteed something like it afterwards: the kingdom had taken a community embedded in every town's commerce and administration and converted it, by law, into a population with nothing to lose from regime change. Later chronicles — hostile, late, and to be handled with tongs — report Jewish communities assisting the conquerors and being entrusted with the garrisoning of captured cities. However much of that is fact and however much is libel written backwards, the structural point stands without it: an order that manufactures internal enemies is spending its own floor.

And in 710 the fault slipped. King Wittiza died; the succession did what it always did. A faction of the palace aristocracy raised Roderic, duke of Baetica, to the throne; Wittiza's sons and their clan were dispossessed and did not accept it; and the kingdom split into two armed camps precisely as the raiders were assembling across the water. The traditions that have Count Julian of Ceuta — a Christian lord on the African shore, his motives wrapped in the legend of a wronged daughter — ferrying Tariq's men across in his own ships, and the Wittizan faction in correspondence with the invaders, are legend-encrusted and unverifiable in their details. What is not legend is the shape of the outcome: when the armies met near the Guadalete river in July 711, parts of Roderic's host — the sources say the wings, commanded by his rivals — did not fight, or did not fight for him. Roderic himself disappeared into the battle; his body was never found; and the army of the kingdom, which was in truth the army of one faction of the kingdom, dissolved.

❧

Why Speed Is the Evidence

What followed has the signature of a state that was already dead at the top rather than one killed from outside. Toledo, the sacral capital, fell with barely a recorded fight. City after city *negotiated* — and we will read one of those negotiations, verbatim, in the next part, because a surrender document from 713 survives and it is worth more than all the battle narratives combined. Musa ibn Nusayr, the governor of Ifriqiya, crossed in 712 with a second army to take charge of what had plainly become, against all expectation, a conquest; by about 714 the two commanders had been recalled east by a suspicious caliph, and the peninsula they left behind was substantially under new management. The conquerors pushed on across the Pyrenees into Gaul until they were checked at Toulouse in 721 and turned back near Poitiers in 732 — which tells you their problem by then was overextension, not resistance.

The project has met this pattern before, and will keep meeting it, because it is one of the most reliable findings in the comparative record: established orders are almost never overthrown by the strength of their challengers; they are forfeited by fracture at their own apex, and the challenger inherits. A few thousand raiders do not destroy a kingdom of millions. A kingdom of millions, organised so that its entire coercive and legitimating apparatus hangs from a throne two factions are fighting over, destroys itself, and a few thousand raiders happen to be standing there when it does. The speed of 711–714 is not a measure of the conquerors' force — they were astonished by it themselves, and the caliph in Damascus initially treated reports from Iberia with disbelief. It is a measure of how little was actually attached to the Visigothic state below the level of the aristocracy that was fighting over it.

Consider what the population was being asked to defend. Two centuries of Visigothic rule had given the peasant majority a fused throne-and-altar that taxed them, an aristocracy that owned them in increasing numbers as the free peasantry slid into dependence, and a legitimating belief — that the anointed Gothic king was God's order on earth — which was barely four generations old in its Catholic form and had been contradicted by palace coup within living memory of every adult. The belief layer over the Visigothic floor of force was real but thin, and it was attached to the dynasty, not to the land or the people; when the dynasty broke itself, there was nothing underneath for loyalty to grip. The common man of Baetica in 711 did not choose Islam, and was not asked to. He watched one set of distant armed men replace another set of distant armed men, discovered that the new ones taxed him at rates initially no worse and in some cases lighter than the old ones, and kept ploughing. That this was a rational reading of his position is proven by what did *not* happen: there was no popular resistance, no guerrilla of the faithful, no rising for the house of Roderic — not in 711, not for a century. The only resistance that ever formed was in the Cantabrian mountains the conquerors had declined to garrison, and its first recorded victory — a skirmish at Covadonga around 722, magnified by later centuries into the foundation stone of a seven-hundred-year crusade — belongs to the next volume, where we will watch memory being manufactured in real time.

❧

What the Conquerors Actually Captured

One more observation belongs here, because the entire volume stands on it. The conquerors did not capture a territory; they captured a *running machine*. The tax registers, the urban administrations, the irrigation

systems, the bishops who could deliver their flocks' acquiescence, the counts who knew what each district owed — all of it was intact, because the conquest had been so fast and so thinly fought that almost nothing had burned. And the conquerors, being a few tens of thousands of men in a peninsula of millions, had no alternative whatever to ruling through it. They could not have administered Iberia themselves; there were not enough of them to collect its taxes, let alone farm its land. Whatever their theology said about the new order of God, their position dictated the actual policy: keep the machine running, put a thin new management layer on top, and price the population's continued obedience in a currency the population would pay.

That pricing system — the most consequential piece of governance technology in this volume, and the one the Christian kingdoms would later copy down to the decimal point — is where we go next. The conquest of 711 explains nothing about the centuries that followed; conquests are cheap, and history is littered with conquerors whose grandsons were folklore. What demands explanation is that a Muslim minority amounting at first to a few per cent of the population governed that peninsula for generations without standing armies of occupation, until the governed, of their own accord and over two long centuries, became the governors' co-religionists. Force took al-Andalus in a season. Something much cheaper than force held it for three hundred years.

PART II

The Price of Belief

A surrender contract from 713 survives in full — and it is the operating manual of the next eight centuries.

Seven Towns and One Dinar

In April 713, in the south-east of the peninsula, the Muslim commander Abd al-Aziz — son of Musa ibn Nusayr, the governor who had crossed to take charge of the conquest — concluded a written peace with a Visigothic lord named Theodemir, whom the Arabic sources call Tudmir. The text survives, copied and recopied through later Arabic compilations; scholars note, as they should, that a document transmitted this way may have been smoothed in transmission, and one modern critic has argued parts were adapted to fit later narratives. But its substance is corroborated by the whole subsequent shape of the region — which kept Theodemir's name for two centuries — and by everything we know of how the conquest actually proceeded. It deserves to be read slowly, because it is the constitutional document of al-Andalus in a way no battle ever was.

The treaty grants Theodemir and his people the protection of God and His Prophet. He remains lord of his seven towns — Orihuela, Alicante, Lorca and four others — and his followers will not be killed, captured, or separated from their women and children. Their churches will not be burned. As the text has it, *they will not be coerced in matters of religion*. In exchange, Theodemir will hand over fugitives and enemies, conceal nothing, and every man of his will pay, yearly, one dinar in coin together with fixed measures of wheat, barley, vinegar, honey and oil.

Read it structurally and every load-bearing element of the next eight centuries is already present. The conquered keep their lord, their law, their land and their God — the entire local machine keeps running under its existing management. The conquerors take a fixed, predictable revenue and a promise of political loyalty, and post no garrison. And the whole arrangement is framed not as extortion, which is what it would look like stripped of its clothing, but as a *contract* — protection and religious liberty rendered in exchange for tribute, with God and His Prophet named as guarantors. The sword that made the bargain possible is nowhere in the text and everywhere behind it.

❧

The Machine of Priced Subordination

The arrangement had a name and a legal theory. In the developing law of the conquerors, Christians and Jews were *ahl al-dhimma* — protected peoples — monotheists with genuine if superseded revelations, entitled to keep their religion and communal law in exchange for submission to Islamic rule, payment of the *jizya* (a head tax on adult male non-Muslims) and the *kharaj* (a tax on their land), and acceptance of a codified subordination: no proselytising among Muslims, no new churches without leave, deference in the street, exclusion from rule over Muslims. The terms varied in practice, hardened and softened with circumstances, and were enforced with everything from negligence to rigour. But the architecture was constant, and the architecture is the point.

This series has argued from its first volume that a durable hierarchy is a floor of force with a managed belief laid over it, and that the belief's function is to make the force cheap — to convert a relationship that would otherwise require a soldier on every corner into one the governed administer for themselves. The dhimma is that proposition built as a legal instrument and priced in coin. The Christian peasant of the Guadalquivir valley did not pay his dinar because a Muslim soldier stood over him; for most of his life he never saw one. He paid because the payment had been defined — by his own bishop and headman as much as by the qadi — as the lawful price of a protected and continuing communal life, collected through his own community's officers, sanctioned by a treaty his own lord had sworn. The extraction wore the clothing of exchange. And like all such clothing it was not simply a costume: the protection was real, the religious continuity was real, the courts did enforce dhimmi rights against Muslims often enough for the promise to be credible. The genius of the instrument — and "genius" here means only that it worked, the same instrument in Christian hands later being no prettier — was that it gave the subordinated population a stake in the stability of its own subordination.

The arithmetic this made possible should be stated plainly, because it is the central fact of the period and it is barely believable. The Muslims of al-Andalus in the first generations — conquering soldiery, their families, and the trickle of eastern settlers — amounted to a few per cent of the population at most; the garrison strength available for actual coercion was a few tens of thousands of men in a peninsula of millions. On pure force, the occupation was a rounding error. It governed anyway, for generation after generation, because the dhimma converted nearly all the work of control into self-administration by the controlled. Force held the cities and the field of battle; belief — the conquered population's belief in its own bargain, administered through its own institutions — held everything else. When this series says that managed belief multiplies force, this is what the words mean in practice: not mind control, but a contract structure under which five million people found it individually rational, year after year, to carry the order that subordinated them.

❧

The Gradient

But the dhimma's deepest property was not stability. It was direction. The contract preserved the conquered religions while attaching a permanent, legible price to them — and attaching permanent, legible advantages to leaving them. Convert, and the jizya vanished from your ledger. Convert, and the legal disabilities fell away, the path into administration and army and the conquerors' marriage networks opened, your testimony

weighed fully in court, your sons started level instead of priced. No one was coerced in matters of religion, exactly as the treaty said; the machine did not need coercion, because it had built a gradient, and populations flow down gradients the way water does — not all at once, not every household, but steadily, generation upon generation, in one direction only.

How fast it flowed is genuinely uncertain, and the uncertainty is worth dwelling on because it is a lesson in method. The standard account rests on the historian Richard Bulliet's celebrated conversion curve: lacking censuses, Bulliet counted distinctively Muslim names in genealogies recorded in later biographical dictionaries and inferred an S-shaped conversion process — slow for the first century and a half, accelerating sharply through the tenth century (the reign of Abd al-Rahman III, as we shall see, sits squarely on the steep part of the curve), and flattening out in the eleventh, with al-Andalus by then in Muslim majority. Those numbers have been repeated for forty years, including in an earlier draft of this very study. They should be handled with more care than they usually get: the source base is thin and skewed toward the urban and learned, and a later scholarly critique has argued the curve was never a measure of population share at all, but of the distribution over time of those who *eventually* converted — a related but different thing. The project's posture obliges us to say so, and to rest the argument on what survives the criticism. What survives is the gradient itself and its direction, which no one disputes: conversion ran overwhelmingly one way, it compounded across the whole period, and somewhere in the broad middle of the era the peninsula's majority crossed over. The precise decade matters to specialists; the mechanism matters to us.

And the mechanism, watched closely, demonstrates the proposition this series calls *formation* — the claim that belief is installed before it can be weighed, and is therefore not a trick played on a free rational mind, because there is no unformed mind underneath to be tricked. The first generation's conversions were frequently and visibly transactional: the chronicles know the type of the tax-convert, and the jurists worried over his sincerity. But his son was raised inside the new faith's calendar, his week organised by its prayers, his name from its names; and his grandson was simply a Muslim, as incapable of experiencing his belief as a great-grandfather's tax decision as any believer anywhere is capable of experiencing his formation from outside. The machine did not merely extract from the governed; it *recruited* its future governors from them, manufacturing sincere believers at scale out of fiscal incentives two generations dead. Each conversion strengthened the order — one more household with a stake in Islamic rule, one fewer in the priced alternative — so the system's belief base compounded like interest, which is why a conquest that began as a raid by a few thousand men ended, without any campaign of forced conversion, in a Muslim country.

❧

Two Communities the Gradient Made

The gradient produced two new human types, and both will drive the violence of later parts, so they need introducing now.

The first were the *muwallads* — the native converts and their descendants, eventually the largest component of Andalusi Muslim society. Conversion, they discovered, cleared the religious ledger but not the social one. The conquest elite was Arab, organised by tribe and lineage, and it sat on top of the new community as it had sat on top of the old one; Berbers, who had done much of the conquering, ranked below Arabs, and converts ranked below both, sometimes — in violation of the law's plain theory — still carrying tax burdens or client

status that conversion was supposed to dissolve. Here is a mechanism this series has traced through England, America, France and China, operating in ninth-century Iberia with textbook clarity: a ruling order's legitimating word must be universal to legitimate — *all believers are brothers, distinction is by piety alone* — and a universal word is a cheque anyone may present. The muwallads presented it. The Arab aristocracy declined, in practice, to cash it. And the difference between the word's promise and the hierarchy's practice became a stored grievance that would, within two centuries, very nearly tear al-Andalus apart — presented for payment at swordpoint by men like Umar ibn Hafsun, whom we will meet in Part VI.

The second type were the Christians who did not convert but changed anyway: the Mozarabs, the "Arabised." They kept the creed and lost, gradually, nearly everything cultural that had surrounded it — language, dress, taste, learning. By the mid-ninth century a Cordoban Christian layman named Paulus Alvarus was lamenting, in a Latin treatise few of his co-religionists could still comfortably read, that the talented Christian young men of the capital knew the rhythms of Arabic poetry and could compose in it better than the Arabs, while scarcely one in a thousand could write a passable Latin letter. He intended it as an indictment; we should read it as data. Formation drifts toward the prestige order even where belief holds — the room's furniture changes before the room's God does — and the anguish of men like Alvarus at watching their community dissolve *without persecution, by attraction* is among the most precise testimony the medieval record offers for how this actually feels from inside. That anguish was about to do something extraordinary, and Part VI will count its dead.

What should be carried out of this part is the machine itself, because the rest of the series depends on recognising it when it reappears: a conquered population kept whole and self-administering; its religion preserved and priced; a gradient of incentives running toward the rulers' faith; extraction framed as contract; force held in reserve and rarely shown. It is a complete technology of minority rule, and it has no theological content whatever — nothing in it depends on what the dominant religion teaches, only on there being a dominant religion to convert toward. The proof of that claim is the central finding of this series' Iberian volumes: when, three centuries later, the military gradient of the peninsula reversed and Christian kings found themselves ruling Muslim majorities, they did not invent a governance system. They adopted this one, article by article, tax by tax, with the signs reversed — the same machine, under new management, extracting from the grandchildren of its builders. A technology that serves both sides of a holy war with equal efficiency is not an expression of either side's truth. It is what this series says it is: the standing equipment of hierarchy, awaiting whoever holds the floor.

PART III

The Massacre and the Refugee

The dynasty was exterminated at a dinner party. One prince swam a river, and the word followed him west.

The Banquet

In 750 the Umayyad dynasty, which had ruled the Islamic world from Damascus for ninety years, was destroyed by a revolution marching out of the eastern province of Khurasan under black banners — the Abbasids, kinsmen of the Prophet through his uncle, riding a coalition of every grievance the Umayyads had accumulated: Persian converts taxed like infidels in defiance of the universal word, Shia loyalists who had never forgiven the dynasty the blood of the Prophet's grandson, pious scholars who held the Umayyads worldly kings in caliphs' clothing. The first Abbasid caliph took the throne-name al-Saffah, which is conventionally rendered "the Blood-Shedder," and set about earning it. The last Umayyad caliph, Marwan II, was hunted to Egypt and killed. And then the new dynasty did something that distinguishes a transfer of power from an extermination: it set out to delete the losing lineage from the world.

The chronicles preserve the scene that came to stand for the whole programme. In Palestine, near the river Abu Futrus, some eighty members of the Umayyad house were invited to a banquet of reconciliation under promise of amnesty — and were clubbed and cut down at the meal. The tradition adds that leather covers were spread over the dead and dying and the victors finished dinner on top of them; that detail is the kind chroniclers polish, and we flag it as chronicle rather than fact, but the substance — a general massacre of the dynasty under safe-conduct, around 750 — is as solid as anything in the period. Umayyad tombs were opened and the remains scourged. The point was not vengeance but arithmetic: a deposed dynasty is a standing coordination point for every future rebellion, and the Abbasids understood that the only safe number of living Umayyads was zero.

They missed one.

The Swim

Abd al-Rahman ibn Muawiya was about twenty, a grandson of the caliph Hisham, when the search parties came for him. The account that survives — ultimately from his own telling, polished by court historians who served his descendants, and to be read with that understood — has him hiding in a village on the Euphrates with his younger brother when the horsemen arrived; the two boys ran for the river and swam. From the

bank, the soldiers shouted promises of safety. The younger brother, exhausted, believed them and turned back. Abd al-Rahman, swimming on, watched from the far side as they killed him. He was thirteen.

What followed was five years of flight — Palestine, Egypt, Ifriqiya, moving by night, hidden by sympathisers, hunted intermittently by Abbasid governors — accompanied for most of it by a single freedman, Badr. His destination was not random. Abd al-Rahman's mother had been a Berber of the Nafza, taken east as a slave-concubine; he had her tongue from childhood, and her tribe, in the Moroccan west, owed him the protection of kinship. Read his position coldly, as this series reads every position: he possessed no army, no treasury, no territory, and a name it was death to carry — but the name was also the single most valuable coordination asset in the western Mediterranean, if a place could be found where the Abbasid writ was weak and the local order was broken enough that contending factions needed a banner that outranked them all. He spent five years walking toward the one place on earth that answered the description.

The Province of Losers

Al-Andalus in 755 was a wreck of factions. The great Berber revolt of the 740s had torn through North Africa and Iberia — the Berbers, having done the conquering, had risen against precisely the second-class treatment the universal word forbade and the Arab elite practised. Syrian regular troops, shipped in to crush the rising, had stayed, and been settled across the southern provinces as regional armies. Arab politics had then split along its ancient tribal fault — Qaysis against Yemenis — and the governorship had been seized by Yusuf al-Fihri, with the Qaysi strongman al-Sumayl behind him, governing as the head of one faction rather than of the province. Every other faction — Yemeni Arabs frozen out of patronage, Berbers nursing the revolt's grievances, Syrian junds whose pay was politics — was a client looking for a patron. None of them could submit to another; all of them could submit to an Umayyad, because his blood outranked the quarrel.

This is position logic operating as a selection mechanism, and it is worth pausing on, because the romantic version — the gallant prince rallying the faithful — obscures the machinery. Abd al-Rahman did not persuade al-Andalus; he *fit* it. His agents (Badr crossed first) found the Syrian junds of Elvira and the Yemeni chiefs already willing, for their own positional reasons, to back any credible Umayyad against the Fihrid clique; his mother's people supplied the first Berber contingents; and when he landed at Almuñécar on the southern coast in the late summer of 755, the coalition assembled around the name before the man had won anything. Yusuf and al-Sumayl, to their credit as analysts, immediately offered him honourable retirement into the governing family — a daughter, estates, a seat. He declined. In the spring of 756 he took Seville without a fight, and in May, outside Cordoba on the banks of the Guadalquivir, his hungry, miscellaneous army met the governor's. The chronicles say that before the battle he exchanged his good horse for a mule, so that his men — who scarcely knew him, and might reasonably suspect a prince of keeping his escape saddled — could see he intended to win or die in the line. The detail is court-historian's polish; the calculation it depicts, a leader pricing his own credibility in front of troops whose loyalty was a day old, is exactly period. He won. He was twenty-five or twenty-six. He would rule for thirty-two years, and his house for two hundred and seventy-five.

The Title He Did Not Take

Now observe, carefully, what the new master of al-Andalus did with his victory, because it is the most instructive single decision in this volume.

He was, by the legitimist theory his own house had propounded for ninety years, the rightful caliph of all Islam — the senior surviving male of the dynasty God had set over the community. The actual caliph, in the new round city rising at Baghdad, was in this theory a usurping butcher. Abd al-Rahman proclaimed — nothing. He took the title of *emir*: commander, governor, prince — a title that asserted full sovereign control of al-Andalus and claimed nothing whatever beyond it. Within a few years the Friday sermon in Cordoba's mosques ceased to be pronounced in the Abbasid caliph's name — the khutba, the weekly naming of the sovereign before the assembled believers, is the medieval world's most reliable public statement of who actually rules, and its silence about Baghdad announced independence to every congregation in the land. But no counter-caliph was proclaimed. The khutba named no caliph at all. For a hundred and seventy years, through six successors, the Umayyads of Cordoba governed as sovereign emirs of an Islamic polity that acknowledged, in theory, a universal office its occupant was their family's murderer — and simply declined to discuss the matter further.

The restraint was not modesty; this was a man who, when the Abbasid caliph al-Mansur sent an expedition against him in 763, destroyed it and — the chronicles report — returned the commanders' heads to Baghdad preserved in salt. (The same chronicles have al-Mansur, upon some such occasion, calling his enemy the Falcon of Quraysh — the admiring epithet of one professional for another across a kill-list; polish again, but polish on a real respect.) The restraint was arithmetic. The caliphal title was a universal claim, and a universal claim is a declaration of war on every other holder; an emirate at the world's western edge could be defended with the armies al-Andalus could raise, but a caliphate would commit him to a contest for the whole community of believers against an empire twenty times his weight. He took exactly as much of the word as his floor of force could carry, and not one syllable more. His descendant would take the rest of it, in 929 — but only when, as we shall see in Part VII, the structure of the Islamic world had changed so that the syllable cost less than its absence.

The refugee had become a state-builder, and the next two parts examine what he and his heirs actually built. But the founding paradox should be stated before we proceed, because the entire volume is an examination of it. Abd al-Rahman ruled a Muslim society, through Muslim law, leading Muslim prayer, performing every function the faith assigned its rightful rulers — while the faith's official supreme authority cursed him from the pulpits of the east as a rebel against God's order. By every theory of religious legitimacy, his position was impossible. It lasted, in his line, for nearly three centuries, and produced the most brilliant state in western Europe. Explaining how is the business of Part IV — and the explanation, once seen, travels far beyond Iberia.

PART IV

The Word Without a Warrant

Baghdad owned the title and cursed the rebel. The rebel kept the law, built the mosques, led the prayers — and discovered the title could not be fenced.

The Impossible Position

State the problem with the precision it deserves. Islamic political theory, as it stood in the eighth century, knew one legitimate order: the umma, the universal community of believers, under one caliph, the Prophet's successor, commander of the faithful. Legitimacy flowed from that office. A ruler unrecognised by the caliph was no ruler; a rebel against him was a rebel against the order God had ordained. The Abbasid caliphs held the office, the capital, the Prophet's relics, the allegiance of the holy cities, and the loyalty of the scholars of the eastern heartlands — and they had formally condemned the Umayyad in Cordoba as an outlaw. He held: Iberia.

If belief worked the way both the naive and the cynical pictures say it works, Cordoba's position could not have survived. In the naive picture — belief as sincere conviction flowing down from doctrine — the Muslims of al-Andalus, taught that legitimacy flows from the caliph, should have been ungovernable by a man the caliph anathematised; every Friday prayer was a reminder of the defect. In the cynical picture — belief as a fraud administered from above — the fraud's licensing authority had revoked the franchise, and the local operator should have found the tools dead in his hands. Neither happened. The mosques filled. The qadis judged. The taxes came in. The frontier volunteers mustered for the summer campaigns against the Christian north under the emir's banner and called it jihad and meant it. Three generations of Abbasid condemnation produced, in al-Andalus, approximately nothing.

What actually happened is the mechanism this series calls the loaded word, operating at full power, and the Cordoban case is perhaps the cleanest demonstration of it in the medieval record — cleaner than England's charters or America's declarations, because here the word's owners were not merely embarrassed by its reuse but actively, theologically at war with it, and lost anyway.

Why the Word Could Not Be Fenced

A legitimating word must be universal to legitimate. That is the trap, and it has no exit. The caliphate's authority did not rest on the Abbasid family's qualities — dynasties are just families, and everyone in the

eighth century knew exactly how the Abbasids had acquired the office. It rested on the universal claims *underneath* the office: that God's law stands above any king; that the community of believers is one, and brotherhood in it is by faith, not blood; that rule is legitimate insofar as it upholds the law, defends the community, and keeps the practice of the faith. Those claims are what made obedience to a caliph different from submission to a warlord. And precisely because they are universal — because they attach to the *function* and not the family — they are available to anyone who performs the function. Baghdad could anathematise the man. It could not recall the word, because the word had never been Baghdad's property; its entire legitimating power came from belonging to God and the community, not to the dynasty holding it. A word fenced to its owner is a deed of title, and legitimates nothing. A word that legitimates cannot be fenced.

So the contest between Baghdad and Cordoba was never really doctrinal — no theological argument was available that condemned Umayyad emirs without indicting the Abbasid seizure, and both sides' scholars knew it. The contest was *performative*: legitimacy would belong to whoever visibly did what the word said rulers are for. And here distance, which looks like Cordoba's weakness, was its decisive asset. The caliph was a name three months' travel away. The emir was the man whose coin was in your hand, whose qadi settled your inheritance by God's law, whose walls kept the Frankish raiders out, whose name — or whose tactful silence — filled the khutba in your own town's mosque on Friday. For the believer in Jaén, Islamic rule was not a theory of offices; it was the experienced fact of living inside a properly run Islamic order, and the emir was its visible operator. Authorisation is abstract. The Friday prayer is concrete. Between an abstract title and a concrete practice, populations choose the practice every time — which is to say, they do not experience themselves as choosing at all.

Spending on the Word

The Umayyads understood this with total clarity, and their budget proves it. What a usurper without a warrant must buy, since he cannot buy authorisation, is *performance* — and for thirty years Abd al-Rahman I and then his heirs spent on the word what other dynasties spent on armies, and found it cheaper and more durable.

He kept the law absolutely: the sharia ran, the courts were staffed and funded, and the emir submitted his own administration to its forms. He kept the practice conspicuously: personal piety, public prayer, the fast, the festivals led in person. He kept the scholars — patronage, appointments, salaries, deference — a relationship Part V will examine in detail, because it had teeth on both sides. He kept the frontier: the seasonal campaigns against the Christian north were many things (training, plunder, internal discipline), but they were above all the caliphal function performed — the defence and expansion of the community that the office in Baghdad claimed and could not execute at this distance. And in 785 or 786, near the end of his life, he began the Great Mosque of Cordoba on the site the Christian cathedral of St Vincent had occupied — tradition says the Christians' remaining share of the site was bought out, a detail we flag as tradition — a forest of recycled Roman and Visigothic columns under double horseshoe arches of alternating red brick and white stone, oriented, enlarged by three later rulers, and intended from the first stone to say in architecture what the khutba would not say in words: that the house of Umayya, which had built the great mosque of Damascus, was still building, and that the centre of God's order is wherever His order is actually kept. It is among the most beautiful buildings human beings have made, and it is also — the two facts do not compete — a thirty-thousand-square-metre legitimacy instrument.

The strategy's one genuine test under arms came in 778, and it is a famous story usually told wrong. The lords of the Ebro valley — Abbasid loyalists and local strongmen, including Sulayman al-Arabi of Barcelona — invited the most powerful Christian ruler in Europe, Charlemagne, to come south and take Zaragoza, intending to use Frankish force and Abbasid legitimacy together to break the Umayyad. Here was the nightmare alignment: the word's official owner and the great external hierarchy, combined against the usurper. It collapsed on contact with the ground. Zaragoza's commander, whatever had been promised, would not open his gates to a Christian army; Charlemagne, after a fruitless siege, turned home; and on the road back through the Pyrenees, at Roncesvalles, Basque mountaineers — Christians, settling local scores with the Frankish empire — annihilated his rearguard. The strategic lesson is the one this part has been arguing: in al-Andalus the word answered to its local performer, and not even Baghdad's blessing plus Europe's strongest army could pry it loose. But the episode carries a second lesson, addressed to this project's standing concern with how memory is manufactured: three centuries later, that rearguard's death at Christian hands was reborn as the *Song of Roland* — the founding epic of crusading Europe, in which the ambushing Basques have become a Saracen host and the dead commander a martyr of Christendom against Islam. The propaganda needs of a later war reached back and rewrote the event wholesale. We will meet this operation again, performed on an entire seven-century period, when the next volume examines the word *Reconquista* itself.

What the Case Proves About Belief

The temptation, watching a condemned rebel successfully operate the machinery of religious legitimacy, is to conclude that the religion was a façade — that the population was indifferent and the apparatus hollow, and Cordoba proves belief is just power's paperwork. The evidence runs precisely the other way, and the point matters enough to close the part on.

The appropriation worked *because* the belief was real. A population indifferent to Islam would have needed garrisons, not mosques; it was the depth and sincerity of Andalusi Muslim practice that made the performative strategy possible at all, since only believers can be governed through their belief. What the case proves is narrower and stranger than cynicism: that sincere belief binds to the *local, visible practice* of its order, not to the distant proprietorship of its titles — that the faith of the governed is genuinely about God and the law and the community, and therefore transfers its political loyalty to whoever credibly administers God's law to the community, with sublime indifference to the quarrels of dynasts over the franchise. The believers of al-Andalus were not deceived about their emir's lack of a warrant; it was discussed, and the dynasty's scholars developed the obvious answers (the Abbasids were usurpers and oath-breakers; the Umayyads held the elder right). They simply did not need the answers, because the question that organised their actual lives — *is this an Islamic order, properly kept?* — had an answer they could see from their own doorsteps.

Rulers have understood this asymmetry in every age that produced rulers worth studying: titles are claimed in capitals, but legitimacy is manufactured locally, in the week-by-week experience of order properly kept — and a word universal enough to sanctify the capital's title is universal enough to sanctify the local manufacturer who performs it better. In 929 a Cordoban Umayyad would finally reach out and take the title itself, and Part VII will show that by then there were three caliphs in the house of Islam, each holding an office whose definition was that there could be only one — the universal word fractured into rival ownerships, each fragment still working perfectly within the ground its holder could actually hold. No event

in the period states this series' case about legitimating language more exactly. But before the word could be taken, the machine beneath it had to survive its first real crises — and the first of these came not from Baghdad or the Christians, but from the very scholars the dynasty had hired to keep the word polished.

PART V

The Canon and the Scholars

The emirs imported a law book to make rule cheap. The men who kept the book discovered they could turn it on the emir.

Medina, Written Down

Under Abd al-Rahman's son Hisham I (788–796) — a ruler the sources paint as genuinely, even scrupulously pious — al-Andalus made a decision about law whose consequences ran for eight centuries: it adopted, as effectively the single authorised school of jurisprudence, the school of Malik ibn Anas of Medina. Malik's great compilation, the *Muwatta*, was a record of the legal practice of one city — the Prophet's own city, whose customs Malik held to be living evidence of the original community's way. Andalusi students travelled east to study with the master himself; they returned carrying Medina in their saddlebags; and within a generation the Maliki school held a near-monopoly of judicial appointments in al-Andalus that it never afterwards lost.

The project's first inquiry identified a recurring mechanism it called, after its oldest exemplar, the Moses dynamic: a leader's situated improvisations — rulings made by a particular man for a particular community's particular circumstances — are written down, the writing is canonised, and the canon is then inherited by generations of enforcers for whom it is no longer one city's adaptations but the fixed template of the right order, against which every living circumstance is measured and found deviant. Watch it operate here with unusual visibility. Malik's rulings were Medinan answers to Medinan questions — the customs of an Arabian oasis town, treated as authoritative because of *whose* town it had been. Carried to Iberia, a conquered ex-Roman province of olive groves, irrigated huertas, Christian majorities and Visigothic property law, the canon did not ask what fit; it asked what Medina had done. From the ninth century to the fifteenth, the operative legal question in Iberian Islam was, in form, a question about the practice of a town three thousand miles away as recorded by a scholar who died in 795.

Why did the emirs choose it — and choose to enforce a single school, where the Islamic east lived comfortably with four? The scholarship offers converging structural answers, and the project endorses the convergence without claiming to read hearts. A single canon is administrable: one school means predictable courts, a unified bench, no forum-shopping between doctrines. Malik's school in particular was conservative, precedent-bound, suspicious of speculative reasoning — qualities attractive to a regime whose deepest need was stability. And a Medinan canon carried a quiet polemical charge that suited a dynasty at cold war with Baghdad: it located authority in the Prophet's city and the original community — pointedly not in the

Abbasid capital and its fashionable rationalisms. The choice, in other words, was tested — a reasoned selection by rulers solving real problems of administration and legitimacy. What it installed was revealed — a closed canon whose guardians would measure all future conduct, including the emirs', against a fixed text. Rulers who buy stability this way are taking a loan, and the interest comes due in a form they never expect: the canon does not stay aimed where its purchasers pointed it.

The Mutual Hostage-Taking

For the canon required a clerisy. Islam has no church — no pope, no ordination, no hierarchy with independent corporate existence — and the comparative literature long treated this as meaning Islamic rulers faced no priestly counterweight. The Cordoban record says otherwise; it says the counterweight simply takes a different form. The ulama — the scholars, jurists, judges, prayer-leaders, the men whose certified learning in the canon made them its authorised interpreters — were individually appointable and dismissible by the emir, and collectively indispensable to him. He needed them to staff the courts, certify his rule as lawful, pronounce the khutba that named him, and teach each generation that obedience to the Muslim sovereign is religious duty. They needed him for positions, salaries, mosques, and the enforcement of their judgements. Neither could replace the other; each could damage the other; and so Cordoba ran, decade upon decade, on a wary, unwritten concordat — the emir governed within the canon's visible limits and paid the scholars their patronage and deference; the scholars certified the emirate and kept their gravest weapon, the public charge of impiety, sheathed.

It is the same structural tension this series traced between Norman kings and the papacy, between Byzantine emperors and their patriarchs, between the Chinese throne and the examination clerisy — the ruler needs legitimation from men whose authority must be independent to be worth anything, and an authority independent enough to legitimate is independent enough to condemn. No ruler ever solves this; the wise ones price it. The mosque network these scholars staffed was simultaneously the regime's communications system — the Friday khutba reaching every congregation in the land weekly, the nearest thing the age had to a state gazette — and the one institution in al-Andalus the apex used but did not own. Hold that fact; the volume's final parts turn on it.

The Canon Bites Back

The interest on the loan came due under Hisham's son. Al-Hakam I (796–822) was a capable, harsh and visibly unscrupulous ruler: he drank wine at court, surrounded himself with a palace guard of Christian and slave mercenaries — mute instruments, foreign to every local faction — and taxed the capital to pay for them. Each item was an affront to the canon; together they handed the scholars of Cordoba, for the first time, a constituency. The crowded southern suburb across the bridge — the Rabad, packed with artisans, muwallad converts, and the students and clients of the jurists — became the sounding-box for the fuqaha's disapproval, and the emir's reign became a running battle with the city he ruled from.

The reckonings came in three instalments, each worse. In 797, at Toledo — chronically rebellious, and not for the last time — the emir's governor invited the city's notables to a banquet at the citadel; they entered by one gate, were beheaded over a ditch dug for the purpose, and the chronicles' figures for the dead run from many hundreds to numbers no one should believe; the event entered Iberian memory as the Day of the Ditch. In 805, a conspiracy in Cordoba itself, blessed by some of the jurists, attempted to replace al-Hakam with a

cousin; it was betrayed, and seventy-two notables were crucified along the riverbank. And in 818 the city's patience and the emir's broke together. The Rabad rose — a mob of thousands, clerically encouraged, storming toward the palace — and was met by the guard, broken in the streets, and then punished as an example to the whole peninsula: three days of licensed sack; some three hundred of the suburb's notables crucified; the entire quarter razed, ploughed, and placed under a ban of rebuilding that archaeology confirms held for centuries — the ground across the bridge stayed empty. The surviving population was expelled wholesale from al-Andalus.

The expulsion exported the rupture, and what the exiles did with it is one of the period's most instructive epilogues. Thousands of Rabadi families crossed to Fez, where the quarter they filled is called the Andalusian bank to this day. Thousands of others took ship east as armed emigrants, seized Alexandria and held it for years, and when an Abbasid army finally expelled them in 827, sailed on and conquered Byzantine Crete — establishing a corsair emirate of exiled Cordoban suburbanites that raided the Aegean for a hundred and thirty years. (The sources on the Cretan venture's leadership disagree in ways scholars still argue over; the Andalusi origin of the conquest itself is not in doubt.) Men formed inside a hierarchy, violently ejected from it, did not become free of hierarchy; they re-poured the only shape they knew on the first ungoverned ground they reached — an emirate, a khutba, a tax system, on a Greek island. This series has called that mechanism the instrument trap when it operates on revolutionaries' armies; here it operated on refugees, with the same result.

Reading the Wreckage

Read structurally, the Rabad crisis is the volume's hinge, and three findings should be carried out of the rubble.

First: the counterweight was real. A generation of comparative writing would lead one to expect that an Islamic autocrat with a mercenary guard faced no institutional check; in fact the canon-bearing scholars had organised the capital against the throne and forced the apex to show naked force in the streets — and the dynasty's response over the following decades concedes how much the episode cost it. Al-Hakam's son Abd al-Rahman II (822–852) systematically repaired the concordat: the offending taxes moderated, the jurists' patronage restored and enlarged, the conspicuous impieties retired, the regime's piety re-performed. The scholars had demonstrated that they could make al-Andalus ungovernable, and the price of governance was paid them thereafter without further demonstrations being required. Pressure had found a channel; the channel was ugly, but it functioned — and the emirate that emerged was more constrained, not less.

Second: the counterweight was a canon, not a constitution. The scholars could veto — they could declare conduct impious and raise the cost of it until the throne yielded. What they could not do was *absorb* conflict procedurally: the canon contained no mechanism for succession disputes, no forum where the apex's composition could be contested short of riot, no way to translate the suburb's grievances into anything but the suburb's blood. Where England's parallel pressures would slowly carve out institutions that could process conflict — councils, charters, eventually parliaments, the long story of the England Series — al-Andalus's one counterweight could only judge outcomes against a fixed text. It could punish a ruler for breaking the canon. It had nothing to say about who should rule, and that silence, two centuries later, is the void the whole order fell into.

Third: the muwallad grievance had now been armed and instructed. The Rabad's dead were disproportionately converts and their sons — men who had crossed the gradient, presented the universal word's cheque of brotherhood, and found the Arab palace pricing their lives at suburb rates. The lesson the survivors carried into exile, and their cousins carried into the hills, was that the cheque would not be honoured in the capital's courts. Within two generations it would be presented at swordpoint across half the peninsula, and the dynasty would come within a province of dying of it.

Abd al-Rahman II's long repair-reign — splendour, bureaucratic refinement on the Abbasid model, and the importation of the Baghdadi musician Ziryab, who reset the capital's music, dress, table service and manners so thoroughly that the order of courses at a formal western dinner descends in part from his rules (formation operating at the level of the dinner table, installing itself far below the level of belief) — restored the machine to apparent health. But the next two strains were already growing inside it: one in the formed conscience of the Christians the gradient was dissolving, and one in the unpaid accounts of the converts it had created. Part VI counts what they cost.

PART VI

The Strains the Machine Survived

Forty-eight Christians volunteered for the executioner to make a dissolving boundary visible. Then the converts' unpaid cheque came due across half the peninsula.

Fire from the Sea

The machine's first great strain of the century came from outside and was the easiest kind, because it was merely violence. In 844 a Viking fleet — the chronicles call the raiders *majus*, "fire-worshippers," a word borrowed from Zoroastrians and applied in bafflement to the new pagans — entered the Guadalquivir, took Seville, and held and plundered the region for weeks before the emirate's forces destroyed or expelled them. Abd al-Rahman II's response is a small case study in why this series calls the coordinating apparatus a metabolism rather than a parasite: within a few years the state had built a naval arsenal at Seville, a standing fleet, and a coastal watch system that met and beat the next Viking visitation in 859. A parasite extracts; a metabolism *learns* — it converts the realm's surplus into adaptations the realm could not produce locally, and the fleet that turned the 859 raiders away from the Guadalquivir was the dhimmi taxpayer's dinar coming back to him as a wall against men who offered no contracts at all.

The strains that mattered came from inside, and they came from the gradient — one from each of the two communities Part II showed it creating.

The Volunteers

Between 850 and 859, in Cordoba, forty-eight Christians were decapitated by the emirate. The number is exact because their chronicler made it so: the priest Eulogius recorded each martyrdom as it happened, in prose that survives, until the forty-seventh entry, which is his own — and what his record shows, read coldly, is one of the strangest and most revealing episodes in the entire history of religious coexistence. With a handful of exceptions, these Christians were not hunted. They volunteered. They walked, singly and in small groups — priests, monks, a soldier, young women, several children of mixed marriages — before the qadi of Cordoba, and there denounced the Prophet in terms the law defined as capital blasphemy, and refused the retraction that the visibly reluctant judges repeatedly urged on them, and were killed. The bodies went on display and then, often, into the river.

Why? Eulogius and his friend Alvarus tell us with bitter clarity, and the structural reading and their own reading for once coincide. It was not that persecution had intensified; it was that *assimilation was succeeding*. These were the years of Alvarus's lament from Part II — the Christian young men perfecting their Arabic verses while their Latin died; the conversions compounding down the gradient; intermarriage seeding households where the children's religion was legally Islam and emotionally negotiable; the boundary between the communities dissolving not under blows but under attraction. The dhimma was working exactly as designed — protection real, price legible, gradient running — and a community can die of that design without one act of violence: not killed, but absorbed. The martyrs' movement was formation fighting formation-drift — a deliberate attempt, by men and women who could feel their community's outline blurring, to redraw the boundary in the one ink guaranteed to be indelible. A public blasphemy and execution made coexistence's hidden terms visible — made the sword inside the contract show itself on a scaffold — and gave the community, in the martyrs' calculation, what it lacked: dead to define it.

The responses are as instructive as the act. The emirate's was reluctant precision: the qadis pressed retraction on the accused (the law's penalty was mandatory once invoked, but no one in authority wanted these deaths); the regime leaned on the church hierarchy to turn the movement off; pressure fell on the Christian community's privileges to remind it what the contract was worth. And the church hierarchy, decisively, complied. A council of bishops at Cordoba in 852, presided over by Reccafred, condemned voluntary martyrdom; clergy associated with the movement, Eulogius among them, saw the inside of prisons at their own bishops' instance; and the Christian establishment of al-Andalus — the bishops, the counts of the Christians who answered for their community's taxes, the propertied families with everything staked on the contract's stability — denounced the volunteers as suicides and provocateurs, not martyrs. The priced community policed its own radicals to keep the price stable: the dhimma machine, under its severest belief-stress of the century, was operated in the regime's defence *by the subordinated community's own leadership*, exactly as its architecture provides. Eulogius spent his last years writing the martyrs' defence against his own church's verdict, sheltered a young convert from Islam named Leocritia, and was beheaded for it on 11 March 859. She followed four days later. The river took both bodies; the faithful retrieved her relics and, decades on, carried them north to Oviedo — where, in the Christian kingdom rising in the unconquered mountains, the Cordoban dead were received as exactly what their own bishops had said they were not. Memory, as always in this series, was sorted by position.

The project holds this episode with the gravity it is owed and refuses both available verdicts. Whether these forty-eight were saints or suicides is a question about souls, and the method brackets it. What the record establishes is colder and worth more: the machine absorbed the heaviest deliberate belief-attack mounted against it in the century — absorbed it largely through the attacked community's own institutions — and the gradient did not pause. By the structural measures, the martyrs' movement failed completely. By the measure the martyrs themselves chose — that there would be a remembered boundary, kept by dead who could not be assimilated — it is the only ninth-century Cordoban enterprise still funded today.

The Cheque Presented at Swordpoint

The second internal strain nearly killed the state. It had been accumulating since Part II: the muwallads — the native converts and their descendants, by now approaching a majority of Andalusi Muslims — held the universal word's promissory note of brotherhood, and the Arab aristocratic order would not cash it. Converts' lineages were mocked in verse; the great offices and estates ran in the old conquest families; and in the

provinces, muwallad lords who carried the emirate's burdens discovered that Cordoba's patronage looked through them. Through the second half of the ninth century the note was presented for payment at swordpoint, province by province, until the emirate of Cordoba governed scarcely more than Cordoba.

The roll-call alone makes the scale clear. Toledo was in revolt or autonomy for decades at a stretch. Mérida rose repeatedly; its great rebel son Ibn Marwan al-Jilliqi carved out an autonomous lordship at Badajoz. On the upper Ebro, the Banu Qasi — muwallad descendants of a Visigothic count named Cassius, allied by marriage with the Christian kings of Pamplona, fighting under either banner as position dictated — grew so great that their lord Musa ibn Musa was called, by the chroniclers, the third king of Spain. The frontier nobility of al-Andalus, in short, was behaving exactly as this series found England's and France's behaving: legitimating language up, autonomy out, allegiance priced by the season. But the gravest case was the south, in the mountains behind Málaga, and it lasted half a century.

Umar ibn Hafsun was a muwallad squire's son turned brigand turned warlord, who from about 880 made the rock-fortress of Bobastro the capital of an anti-Cordoba. At his height he dominated the mountain country across wide stretches of southern al-Andalus — the network attributed to him would eventually be reckoned in dozens of strongholds — drawing to his banner everyone the order had priced and shorted: muwallads first, Christian peasants alongside, every grievance the gradient and the unpaid cheque had stored for a hundred and fifty years. Under the emir Abdallah (888–912), with the marches gone and the south in Hafsunid hands, the emirate of Cordoba was reduced to little more than its home districts; the chroniclers' ledger of those years reads like a state in dissolution, and contemporaries reasonably expected the Umayyad order to end.

Then, around 899, Ibn Hafsun converted to Christianity — and the structural logic of legitimating words, which this volume has been assembling piece by piece, snapped into perfect visibility. Read his career as a sequence of word-choices, each rational in position: he had fought as a Muslim grievance-lord (the word: the umma's betrayed brotherhood); he had flirted with Abbasid allegiance (the word: the true caliph against the usurper); he would later treat with the new Fatimid power in Africa (the word again, in its Shia edition); and finally he reached for his ancestors' Christianity — presumably to weld his Christian peasant base and northern alliances to him. It was the one choice the structure forbade. The word is not a flag a leader flies over interchangeable troops; the word *selects the army* — each legitimating language recruits exactly the coalition that believes it and repels the coalition that believes its rival. At the apostasy, his muwallad chiefs — rebels against Cordoba, but Muslims — began to peel away; the revolt's Muslim base shrank toward its Christian core; and a movement that had nearly replaced the emirate dwindled into a mountain hold-out. He died in 917, undefeated and strategically finished. His sons held Bobastro another decade.

The dynasty's closing gesture over the affair belongs in this series' permanent exhibit of legitimacy-engineering. When Bobastro finally fell in 928, the new ruler in Cordoba — Abd al-Rahman III, whom the next part introduces — had Ibn Hafsun's body dug out of its grave, verified (the propagandists made sure the verification was famous) to have been buried as a Christian, carried to Cordoba, and exposed on the gates between two crucified companions. A rebellion of fifty years, rooted in the unpaid promises of the order's own universal word, was thus posthumously *re-worded* — recast as the treason of a secret apostate, an enemy not of the hierarchy's accounting but of God. The corpse on the gate was an editorial. Power was correcting the story while the body was still available to print it on — and the correction held, for the chronicles the age handed down are Cordoba's, and in them the muwallad grievance dissolves into the

apostate's perfidy. The volume's reader, having watched the cheque written in Part II and bounce in Part V, knows what the editorial was for.

The emirate had survived its formation crisis and its accounting crisis — barely, and the second one only because the rebellion's word-choices broke its coalition before Cordoba's armies broke its walls. What walked out of the wreckage in 912 was a twenty-one-year-old with red hair, a Christian grandmother from the royal house of Pamplona, a realm in fragments, and a clearer understanding of the machinery this volume has been describing than perhaps any ruler in his dynasty's history. He would reassemble the state, take the word's last syllable, and build the most dazzling court in the western world — and inside his solutions, invisible to everyone including him, the order's death was already assembling. He is Part VII.

PART VII

The Third Caliph

A rival caliphate rose in Africa, and against a counter-claim to the universal word, an emirate was no longer a tenable denomination. In 929 there were three Commanders of the Faithful.

The Inheritance

Abd al-Rahman III took the throne of a broken state in October 912, aged twenty-one, by his grandfather's deliberate choice over surviving sons — a preference whose background was the usual Umayyad family weather (the young man's father had been executed years before on his own brother's accusation). The prince himself was a walking summary of the peninsula the dynasty ruled: through his mother and grandmother — the latter a princess of Pamplona's royal house, come to Cordoba in the era's traffic of hostages and brides — he carried the blood of the Basque kings; the chronicles describe him as fair, red-haired, and given to dyeing his beard black, the better to look the part the word required. Nothing in this volume says motives are readable, but conduct is: within ten days of his accession, the head of a rebel commander stood over a Cordoban gate. The new emir had announced his programme.

The programme took twenty years, and its shape matters more than its battles. He did not, in the main, exterminate the rebel lords; he *repriced* them — campaign by campaign, district by district, the realm's autonomies were offered terms, and the terms were honourable absorption into a reformed state: surrender the fortress, enter the army or the administration, keep wealth and rank as the sovereign's servant rather than his rival. Seville came in 913; the Hafsunid network was reduced fort by fort until Bobastro fell in 928 and the corpse on the gate closed the ledger of Part VI; Mérida and the lower march followed; Toledo, last as always, fell to siege in 932. The frontier wars against León and Navarre were pressed in person — until 939, when a Christian coalition under Ramiro II of León caught and shattered the caliphal army at Simancas, the sovereign himself escaping by a margin the chronicles enjoyed; he never took the field again, and the campaigns thereafter went out under professionals. Hold that adjustment; it returns in Part VIII bearing consequences no one priced at the time.

The Counter-Claim from Africa

The decision history remembers him for, though, was forced from outside, by the event of 909: in Ifriqiya — modern Tunisia, close enough that its politics washed onto Andalusi beaches — a revolutionary movement of Ismaili Shia missionaries overthrew the local dynasty and proclaimed its imam *caliph*: the Fatimids,

claiming descent from the Prophet's daughter, and claiming with the office not a province but the world. This was a different order of threat from anything in the volume so far. Baghdad's caliphate was a distant proprietorship Cordoba had learned to ignore. The Fatimid caliphate was a live, militant, missionary counter-claim to the universal word, within raiding distance, with a doctrine purpose-built to recruit the discontented of any Sunni order — and its agents had already touched al-Andalus's rebellions: Ibn Hafsun himself, in his sequence of word-choices, had treated with the Fatimid power. The threat was not invasion. The threat was that the word itself — the claim under which all Muslim allegiance ultimately filed — now had an aggressive rival vendor in the western Mediterranean, and every malcontent in the peninsula had somewhere to take his allegiance shopping.

Against a counter-caliph, the emiral title — that exquisite, self-denying calibration of 756, sovereignty without the universal syllable — stopped being prudence and became concession. Titles are a currency, and the man holding the lesser denomination concedes the exchange rate: an *emir* is, by the word's own grammar, somebody's subordinate, and with two caliphs bidding, the question *whose?* had acquired operational meaning. On 16 January 929, with Bobastro stormed and the realm reassembled, Abd al-Rahman III resolved the question by exiting it: he proclaimed himself Caliph, Commander of the Faithful, and took the throne-name al-Nasir li-Din Allah — He Who Brings Victory to God's Religion. The proclamation's stated ground was the dynasty's right — the Umayyads had held the caliphate before the Abbasid usurpation, and were merely resuming it. Its operational ground was the one this part has laid out: the word had become contested property in the west, and a sovereign who declined to claim it would eventually be defined by someone else's claim.

There were now three caliphs in Islam — Baghdad, Mahdia, Cordoba — each holding an office whose entire definition was that there could be only one, each commanding the full sincere allegiance of the believers within his actual reach, none able to make his universal claim operate one mile beyond it. The configuration would persist for a century, and the project pauses on it because it is the cleanest natural experiment on legitimating language anywhere in this series. The universal word, fractured into three rival ownerships, did not weaken — *each fragment worked perfectly* within the ground its holder held. The believers of al-Andalus were not troubled by Fatimid arguments, nor Egypt's (the Fatimids took Egypt in 969) by Cordoba's. Belief, this volume keeps finding, is real, sincere, and locally administered; the universal claims it runs on are genuinely universal in content and stubbornly territorial in operation; and a word that cannot be fenced also cannot be monopolised — whoever performs it, owns it, exactly as far as his performance reaches. Three Commanders of the Faithful is not a paradox of Islam. It is the general truth about universal legitimating claims, demonstrated with unusual honesty: there is no arbiter above the performers, and never has been — there is only ground, held or not held, with a word flying over it.

The Apparatus of Splendour

What followed the proclamation was thirty years of deliberate, budgeted magnificence, and it should be read as Part IV taught: spending on the word. A caliph must out-perform an emir, and the new caliphate's instruments were built accordingly. A mint struck gold — the first Andalusi gold dinars, ending two centuries of silver, because coin is the khutba you carry in your purse: every gold piece that crossed a Mediterranean counting-table published the claim that Cordoba paid in the metal of empires. The bureaucracy was rebuilt and centralised; the army professionalised; the fleet enlarged until it disputed the western sea with the

Fatimids; a forward policy in Morocco hired and armed Berber clients to deny Africa's shore to the rival word.

And from 936 the claim was poured into limestone. Madinat al-Zahra, a complete palace-city raised on the slopes west of Cordoba — government, mint, mosque, gardens, garrison, the caliph enthroned at the apex of a terraced architecture through which ambassadors ascended ceremonially from the plain — was the word made visible, a machine for installing awe in visitors, and the chronicles dwell on its receptions: the basin of quicksilver in the great hall that, struck, filled the room with shivering light (chronicle-grade, and irresistible, and we flag it as both). Cordoba below it grew into one of the largest cities of the western world — the medieval figures run from one hundred thousand souls to half a million and the honest answer is that no one knows; what is certain is that Latin Europe had nothing within an order of magnitude, and knew it: a Saxon nun, Hrotsvitha, writing from the other end of Christendom, called the city the ornament of the world. Al-Nasir's son al-Hakam II (961–976), the dynasty's scholar, built the library whose catalogue alone was said to run to forty-four volumes and whose holdings the chronicles put at four hundred thousand books — a figure to be flagged, like every chronicle figure, and a magnitude not to be doubted, for the book-hunting agents Cordoba kept in the markets of Cairo and Baghdad are independently attested. This is the al-Andalus of the golden-age memory — the courtly Jewish statesman-physician Hasdai ibn Shaprut negotiating for the caliph and patronising Hebrew letters; the translation movement; the irrigated countryside running new crops through Roman channels rebuilt and extended. The memory is selective, as Part VI's scaffolds and corpse-editorials establish — but it is not false, and the project does not trade one selective memory for another. The machine at mid-century ran superbly, and most of the people inside it were materially better off than most of the people anywhere else in Europe. Both facts. Held together.

The Bill, Itemised Quietly

Now itemise what the splendour had cost structurally, because every line returns in Part VIII with interest.

To reassemble the realm, al-Nasir had professionalised force: the old levies of Arab tribal settlers, factional and unreliable, were progressively displaced by troops who belonged to their paymaster alone — *saqaliba*, slave-soldiers imported young from eastern Europe, raised in the palace without kin or clan in the country; and Berber regiments recruited increasingly as formed units from the Moroccan client network. Each step was tested, rational, and locally correct: the tribal jund had nearly lost the dynasty its state, and an army without local roots cannot join a provincial rebellion. But note the trade. An army without local roots also cannot be checked by local society — it has no cousins to answer to, no stake in the country's stability beyond its pay — and a force whose loyalty is purchased is loyal to the purchase, not the purchaser. The series named this the instrument trap when revolutionaries fell into it: you cannot build a force sufficient to your enemies without building a force sufficient to yourself. Monarchies fall into it from the other side, hiring their way out of one danger and into a deeper one. By the century's end, the soldiers of the Cordoban caliphate were strangers to al-Andalus, and al-Andalus to them; the country was, in effect, garrisoned by its own army.

To dignify the apex, the caliphate had also perfected seclusion. The accessible emir of the old style gave way to the veiled sovereign of Madinat al-Zahra, approached through chamberlains, visible as ceremony — magnificence's standard operating procedure, and its standard vulnerability: an apex experienced only as ceremony can be *performed* by whoever controls the ceremony, and after Simancas the sovereign no longer

even commanded his armies in person. The offices between the throne and the world — the chamberlainship above all, the *hijaba* — had become the places where the state actually happened.

And the succession remained what it had been since the Visigoths: nothing. No rule, no institution, no procedure — a designated heir if the sovereign had arranged one, and otherwise the harem, the chamberlains and the regiments, negotiating by dagger. The one counterweight in the system, the Maliki scholars of Part V, had doctrine for a ruler's impiety but, as that part found, nothing for the only question that kills states: *who rules next, and says who?*

Al-Nasir died in 961, after forty-nine years of reign. A famous chronicle tradition has a memorandum found among his papers, in which the most successful ruler in the dynasty's history had noted the days of his life that were pure and untroubled happiness, and counted fourteen. The document is almost certainly literature rather than archive, and the age knew what it was doing when it composed it: a meditation, placed in the one mouth that had held everything, on what the apex of the world's machinery is actually worth to the man inside it. The project keeps it for a different moral. Fourteen days or none, the machine he perfected did not require his happiness — and within fifteen years of his death it would demonstrate, with terrible elegance, that it did not require a caliph either.

PART VIII

The Capture and the Rupture

A manager seized the machine and ran it better than its owners — proving the word and the state had come apart. When his son reached for the word itself, both halves died.

The Child and the Administrator

Al-Hakam II, the scholar-caliph, died in 976 leaving the throne to Hisham II, a boy of about ten. The configuration was the oldest trap in monarchy — a child apex, a regency, and a court of professionals between the child and the state — and out of it, over five years of patient eliminations, climbed one of the most remarkable operators in the medieval record: Muhammad ibn Abi Amir, a provincial gentleman of modest Arab lineage who had begun as estate-steward to the boy's mother, the basque-born queen-mother Subh, and proceeded through the mint, the judiciary's edges and the regency's confidence like a man ascending a ladder he could see and no one else could. Each rung was a service someone at court genuinely needed — the literature of position logic in this project's files could take him as its type specimen, for at no point did he hold an office his patrons had not found it rational to give him. He partnered the vizier al-Mushafi to manage the succession, then destroyed him. He allied with the great frontier general Ghalib, married his daughter, then met him in battle and finished him (981). From 981 he was hajib — chamberlain — with the state in his hand, and took a throne-name as if the office were a crown: al-Mansur bi-llah, Victorious by God. The Christian north, which had reason, remembered him as Almanzor.

What he built over the next twenty years must be stated with structural precision, because it is the volume's terminal mechanism. He did not depose Hisham II. He *sealed* him — the caliph, grown to harmless adulthood, lived ceremonially walled in his palace, prayed for in every khutba, stamped on every coin, displayed at intervals, and connected to the government of al-Andalus by nothing whatever. The administration itself moved physically out of the caliphal city to a new palace-complex al-Mansur built east of Cordoba — al-Madina al-Zahira, the Shining City, a pointed echo of the dynasty's own Zahra — where the diwans, the treasury and the seals operated under the hajib's hand. Authority's word and authority's machine had been pulled apart and housed at opposite ends of the city: in the west, a caliph who was pure legitimacy and no state; in the east, a state that was pure administration and no legitimacy, borrowing the caliph's name for its documents. Every government of the Amirid era was conducted, lawfully and in form, *on behalf of* a man who could not leave his garden.

Substitute Legitimacy, Bought by the Campaign

A regime in that posture has a specific deficit, and al-Mansur's solutions to it organised everything he did. He could not be the word — a chamberlain of ordinary lineage could claim no caliphate, and (the volume's reader now sees why) the puppet was therefore *load-bearing*: only Hisham's name made the Amirid state lawful, which is exactly why Hisham had to be kept alive, sealed, and childless of political meaning. So the hajib performed legitimacy instead, in the only currencies available to a non-caliph — piety and victory — and the scale of the performance ate the state.

For the scholars, he staged orthodoxy: an early, notorious purge of al-Hakam's great library, the philosophical and heterodox holdings censored and burned with jurists in attendance — the dynasty's intellectual treasure spent as a bribe to the canon's guardians, who repaid him with certification that the usurpation was pious. He copied the Quran in his own hand and carried it on campaign; he added, with conspicuous devotion, an enormous extension to the Great Mosque. For everyone else, he staged the caliphal function itself: war against the unbelievers, prosecuted at a tempo no caliph had matched — the count the sources give is some fifty-odd campaigns in twenty-odd years, roughly two a year, every year, without exception and effectively without defeat. Barcelona stormed and burned (985); León broken (988); and in 997 the campaign that made his name a Christian curse for a millennium: Santiago de Compostela, the apostle's shrine and the north's holiest ground, taken and razed — the tomb itself, the chronicles note, pointedly spared — and the cathedral's bells carried south on the shoulders of Christian captives to hang as lamps in the Cordoba mosque. (Two and a half centuries later a Castilian king would send them back on Muslim shoulders; the next volume keeps that appointment.)

Read the campaign-machine structurally and its function is triple. It was fiscal: plunder and tribute serviced the army. It was the army's own maintenance: the Berber regiments he now imported wholesale — entire tribal contingents shipped from Morocco, swelling the force that had no roots in the country — required employment and pay, and the campaigns were both. And it was the regime's legitimacy refreshed by subscription: each autumn's victory parade was the proof, renewed at the only cadence performance allows, that God's order was being executed by the man who held the machine, whatever the man in the garden was for. It worked totally. He died in his bed in 1002, returning from his final campaign, undefeated, the most powerful ruler al-Andalus ever produced — and the epitaph the structure writes is the one that matters: he had solved every problem of his own position, and every solution was a debit against the position of whoever came next. A state had been converted into a performance that required an al-Mansur; al-Mansurs are not a renewable resource.

The Six-Month Error

His son Abd al-Malik ran the system competently for six years and died in 1008 (poison was rumoured; it always is). The machine then passed to the second son, and to the volume's final demonstration. Abd al-Rahman — called Sanchuelo, "little Sancho," for his grandfather Sancho of Navarre, whose daughter had come to al-Mansur in a tributary marriage — held his father's offices, his father's army, his father's apparatus. What he did not hold was his father's understanding of what the sealed caliph was *for*. Within weeks of succeeding, he extracted from the childless Hisham II a formal document naming the hajib — a non-Qurayshi, a Berber-backed Amirid, a man whose public reputation ran to wine — heir to the caliphate itself.

The volume's whole architecture predicts what followed, which is the kind of prediction the project trusts. The Amirid regime was lawful exactly insofar as it served the Umayyad word; the fiction was the load-bearing member; and Sanchuelo had now announced the fiction's termination — converting, in one document, every constituency's relationship to the regime. For the Umayyad clan, expropriation; for the scholars, a canonical impossibility on the throne; for Cordoba's populace, formed by two and a half centuries of the dynasty's word, usurpation made naked. In February 1009, with Sanchuelo absent on a token campaign, the city rose almost without resistance; an Umayyad great-great-grandson of al-Nasir was proclaimed caliph; the Shining City — the Amirids' separated state-machine — was sacked to its foundations. And Sanchuelo's army, that rootless professional instrument, performed its final structural service by demonstrating what purchased loyalty is: it evaporated around him on the march home, regiment by regiment, the Berbers riding off to negotiate with the new power as any force loyal to pay negotiates with any new paymaster. He was taken and killed in March, his body displayed — the editorial gesture of Part VI, now performed by the word's defenders on the machine's heir. He had held al-Andalus for four months and broken in six weeks a fiction that had carried it for thirty years.

The Rupture, and the Accounting

What followed deserves a sober paragraph rather than a battle narrative, because the next twenty-two years (1009–1031) — the *fitna*, the breaking — are the volume's terminal demonstration of its first volume's grimmest theorem: tear the coordinating apparatus and the difference is collected in lives. The capture had hollowed the word; the coup had smashed the machine; and there was now no procedure in the entire civilisation of al-Andalus — no canon-text, no council, no electorate, nothing — for deciding the only question on the table. It was decided, therefore, by the instruments: the Berber regiments backing caliphs of their choosing, the saqaliba commanders backing theirs, the Cordoban populace backing the dynasty's, and the city paying for each verdict in turn. Madinat al-Zahra, the word poured in limestone, was sacked and burned by Berber troops in 1010 and never inhabited again — its columns were being quarried for other men's palaces within the generation. Cordoba itself stood siege for nearly three years and was sacked in 1013 with massacres the sources do not let us count; among the refugee families was that of a young jurist named Ibn Hazm, who would spend his exile writing, first, the most tender book the age produced on love, and later, the most unforgiving on the sects — a mind formed by the ruin, cataloguing what had been lost and whose doctrines he held responsible. Puppet succeeded puppet — Umayyads, then Hammudids (Berber-backed sharifs who, note well, claimed the caliphal title themselves: even the wreckers needed the word) — twelve caliphs in the office's final century, most of them brief, most of them ending violently. In 1031 the notables of Cordoba — a council of the city's patricians, the nearest thing to a constituted body the ruin had left — met and formally resolved the question by abolishing it: there would be no further caliph. The universal office, taken in 929 because against a counter-claim it could not be declined, was retired one hundred and two years later by a municipal committee, because no one could hold it and everyone could bleed for it.

The accounting the project's method demands cannot be completed here, and honesty requires saying so plainly: no registers survive to count the fitna's dead, and the chronicle figures are rhetoric. What can be stated is the shape that every source and every excavation confirms. The visible violence — the battles of the regiments, the sieges, the sacks — was the smaller killer. The greater one was metabolic: the unified fiscal and market order of the peninsula fractured into some thirty successor statelets; the irrigation, grain and coin networks that had carried Cordoba's enormous population were severed at thirty new borders; and the city

that had been, by whatever figure one trusts, among the largest in the western world, contracted within a generation to a provincial town quarrying its own palaces — not massacred, but *starved of the coordination that had fed it*. The Thirty Years' War and the An Lushan rebellion sit in this series' second-inquiry files as the great demonstrations that the collapse of coordination kills more than the clash of armies; the fitna of al-Andalus belongs on the same shelf, written smaller only because the registers are poorer.

And the rupture reloaded the shape — the first inquiry's bleakest regularity, confirmed here without exception worth recording. The thirty-odd taifa kingdoms that emerged from the wreck were not new political forms; each was a Cordoba in miniature — a court, a hajib, court poets pricing praise, a palace built from caliphal spolia, several even keeping pet "caliphs" or the title's regalia about the premises — ruled, in the main, by exactly the instruments the caliphate had imported: Berber commanders here, saqaliba generals there, the old administrative families where they could hold a city. Men formed inside a hierarchy, when it shatters, build the only shape they know, at whatever scale the fragments allow. And within a generation, these thirty small Cordobas would discover the cost of being small in a peninsula that also contained consolidating Christian kingdoms — and would begin buying their survival year by year, in gold, from the kings of León and Castile. That protection-market, the *parias* system — a balance of hierarchies priced in tribute, and the opening case of this series' second inquiry — is where Volume II begins.

❧

What the Case Confirms, What It Strains

The project closes every volume by auditing its own framework against the case, holding its theses as tested and never revealed, and this case has been generous in both directions.

Confirmed, first: the word can be appropriated against its lawful owner — but only by performance, and only because belief is real. Cordoba is the cleanest specimen in the files of legitimating language outrunning its proprietors: a condemned refugee operated Islam's full legitimating apparatus for thirty-two years against the title-holder's standing anathema, his house for nearly three centuries, and the mechanism was not deception but the structure of universality itself — a word that legitimates cannot be fenced, and binds to its visible local performance rather than its distant proprietorship. Confirmed, second: the machine is metabolic and belief-neutral. The same administrative and fiscal order ran under Visigoths, emirs, caliphs, a chamberlain-dictator, and thirty taifa kinglets — and the dhimma instrument at its heart would shortly run, signs reversed, under Christian kings; equipment that serves every creed that captures it is infrastructure, not theology. Confirmed, third: the instrument trap, in its monarchical form — the rootless army hired against rebellion became the arbiter of succession — and the manager's capture, the word and the machine pulled apart until a fiction was the only load-bearing member, and one heir's hand on the fiction brought down both.

Strained, and recorded as strained: the first inquiry's central variable — plurality of counterweights as the release-valve that lets pressure exit as reform — fits this case awkwardly, and the misfit is instructive. Al-Andalus *had* a counterweight the apex did not own: the Maliki scholars, who broke a tax regime, disciplined emirs, and priced impiety for two centuries — and the order ruptured anyway, totally. The resolution the case suggests is a sharpening, not a rescue: what matters is evidently not the existence of counterweights but their *jurisdiction*. A canon can veto conduct; it cannot absorb succession. The scholars could tell the apex what it might not do, and had nothing whatever to say about who the apex should be — and it was through that

precise silence, the unprocedured transfer of power, that every catastrophe in this volume entered: 711, 1009, 1031. The England Series found liberty growing where counterweights acquired jurisdiction over the apex's own composition; this volume supplies the control case, an order with a strong counterweight of the wrong jurisdiction, and the framework comes out of the comparison revised — *plurality* is too coarse a variable, and the revision is hereby adopted.

And the strongest counter-position, held honestly at the close: perhaps doctrine content mattered more than this volume's structural method allows. The argument would run so: Islam's caliphate was universal and indivisible by definition, leaving no lawful way to share or localise supreme authority — so Cordoba could only abstain from the word (756), seize it whole (929), or run it as fiction (981), and the rupture was written into the word's own grammar; a Christian-style anointed dynasty, divisible and localisable, might have processed 976 as a mere regency. The volume concedes the argument real force and notes what it omits: the Christian kingdoms of the same peninsula, running precisely that rival grammar, spent these same centuries partitioning realms among heirs and butchering each other over successions — the word's grammar differed; the unprocedured apex, and its costs, did not. The honest verdict is that this case alone cannot decide between *any universal word would have died this way* and *this word's particular grammar chose this particular death* — and the project declines to decide it here, because the evidence that can decide it is the next two volumes: the same peninsula, the rival word, the same machine changing hands. The laboratory continues; the posture holds. Tested — never revealed.

A Note on Sources

The project's method requires that load-bearing specifics — dates, figures, named institutions, the texts of documents — be verified against current scholarship rather than asserted from memory or inherited from earlier drafts, and that the reader be told where the evidence is thin. The principal modern works consulted and relied upon for this volume include Roger Collins, The Arab Conquest of Spain, 710–797 and Caliphs and Kings: Spain, 796–1031; Hugh Kennedy, Muslim Spain and Portugal: A Political History of al-Andalus; Maribel Fierro, 'Abd al-Rahman III: The First Cordoban Caliph; Janina Safran, The Second Umayyad Caliphate; Peter Scales, The Fall of the Caliphate of Córdoba; Eduardo Manzano Moreno and Pierre Guichard on the conquest society and its structures; Jessica Coope, The Martyrs of Córdoba and Kenneth Baxter Wolf, Christian Martyrs in Muslim Spain, for Part VI; Richard Bulliet, Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period, read together with Alwyn Harrison's critique "Behind the Curve" (Al-Masāq, 2012), for the conversion question in Part II; and Olivia Remie Constable's sourcebook Medieval Iberia for the Treaty of Tudmir and other documents in translation.

Where the volume reports a detail of chronicle-grade reliability — the leather covers at the banquet of 750, the mule at al-Musara, the quicksilver basin, the memorandum of fourteen days — it says so in the text at the point of use, because the discipline of flagging belongs beside the claim, not in an apparatus the reader may never visit. Population figures, army sizes and the great library's catalogue are given as the ranges and contested claims they are. The conclusions throughout are the project's own; the sources supply the verified specifics on which a structural reading must stand or fall.